DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 049 663 FL 002 182

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TITLE Language Fairs and Foreign Languages.
PUB DATE [Mar 71]
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Second International Meeting of the Cntario Modern Language Teachers Assn. and the New Ycrk State Federation of Foreign Language Teachers, Toronto, Canada, March 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Cccurricular Activities, Community Cooperation, Cultural Education, Foreign Culture, Language Instruction, *Modern Languages, Motivation, *Public Relations, *School Community Relationship, Secondary Schccls, Secnd Language Learning, Social Reinforcement, Student Attitudes, *Student Motivation, Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

The nature and function of language fairs are explored in this article. Seen as a source of student motivation toward second language learning and as a means of improving public relations with the community, the language fair is described as being a miniature carnival in the planning and operation of which students, parents, and teachers participate. Numerous, specific suggestions are included about what should be done and what not to do while organizing a language fair. (RL)

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LANGUAGE FAIRS and FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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LANGUAGE FAIRS and FOREIGN LANGUAGES

(A paper read with slight revisions, at the Second Annual Joint International Conference in Toronto, sponsored by the New York State Association of F. L. Teachers and the Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association on March 27, 1971).

The topic I will discuss in this paper is Language Fairs. My comments will be in answer to my own self-posed questions.

1. What is a Language Fair?
2. Why have a LF?
3. What will a LF achieve and <u>not</u> achieve?
4. What do you <u>do</u> and <u>not do</u> at a LF?

I am beginning with questions, very general ones, because few people are familiar with the concept of a LF, especially myself. I have never participated in or impresario-ed a LF. However, my own lack of expertise should not cause the reader to lose heart, because most of us have come to realize that, given the present state of language teaching today, none of us is really an expert. If we were, we would be more popular with students, guidance counselors, parents, and administrators, in any order you like, and the word "crisis" would appear less often in our professional literature.

1. What is a LF? A LF is a large group activity, a whole school, or several schools or districts doing <u>things</u> for a day, or several hours, at least, in a large area, a gymnasium, a college campus, an athletic field, or whatever is available, with no sense of curriculum, tests, or academic

reality or pressure intruding. It is a kind of miniaturized Woodstock. It is a fun day, yet a day with a sense of structure and purpose, as is a circus. But unlike a circus, there are very few spectators, mostly participants, enjoying themselves meaningfully, with somehow FL being the leitmotif or theme that runs thru everything, as a theme runs thru a cadenza. Teachers and kids participate and enjoy themselves. The things the participants do will be specified in a few minutes, in answer to question 4.

2. Why have a LF? One reason is PR, obviously, Public Relations with the kids or clients or customers. And the students are our customers, but lately they have told us, as they did before Sputnik, that they are not buying what we're selling. Perhaps our selling has been a hard-sell, too hard.

We should not feel too guilty about the concept of PR in relation to Foreign Language. After all, U.S. Steel, General Motors, the railroad industry, the President of the U.S., and many other political, industrial, economic, and religious areas of our nations are also acutely and actively concerned with image or aura or PR; or expressed differently, with the receptivity of the public or clientele to the product. That's why pediatricians give babies lollypops, and dentists give rides on their chair to frightened or reluctant children.

Another reason for having a LF is to let the customers DO, instead of being DONE TO, to let them participate actively instead of merely reacting passively. A great deal of the work and planning should be done by our students. Kids today want to feel that they participate in the unfolding of their destiny, instead of being inert spectators as their life is being decided. They do not want to be folded, spindled or mutilated.

Further, it is good and wholesome for teachers to have the kids on their side for a change, with no thought of grades or tests or reports. Too many young people think or feel that we were born at the age of 30 or 40 or 50, fully

dressed, that we live on a diet of tests, grades, and participles, that we have little identity outside of class. It is good that they should see us occasionally in jeans, tennis shoes, sweatshirts, laughing, working and sweating with them. When my college sophomore daughter was in elementary school she was shocked to learn that her teacher could smoke, break her arm one day, and could occasionally be seen emerging from the ladies' room.

Most important, the idea of fun and FL study should not seem incompatible to our students. After all, most of them <u>will not</u> major in our field or take advanced degrees in European Literature.

3. What will a LF achieve and what will it <u>not</u> achieve?

A LF will get everyone out of class for a few hours before and during the Fair. It will act as a sort of breather or intermission during the Spring (if that is the time selected), when everyone, students and teachers, is getting "up tight", and tired of the subject, each other, and school in general. It will show the students an extra dimension of FL study, one that transcends tapes and tests and texts. It will show them the human side of their teachers and act as a relief valve for the accumulated irritations of students and teachers.

It will permit guidance counselors, principals, superintendents, and parents (all of whom should be invited) to see FL study that can, thru the Fair, excite the students. It may even, please God, stop or reduce the decline in student enrollments or possibly modify the long-standing feeling of students that FL study should be eliminated from the curriculum.

What will the LF <u>not</u> achieve? It will <u>not</u>, of itself, make up for bad teaching, dull materials, rigid teachers, dead-end FL methodologies and philosophies. It will not overcome the hostility in students engendered by

punitive teachers, nor the resentment created in students by humorless or inflexible or unsympathetic teachers who are obsessed by elitist or unrealistically high standards, or who jam "great literature" or the"classics" down the throats of unready or immature or unreceptive or culturally or intellectually deprived students.

The LF is only a means towards the creation of a receptive climate or attitude toward FL study on the part of the students. It is the sugar that makes the rest of the meal go down a little more easily or pleasantly.

4. What <u>do</u> you do and what <u>don't</u> you do at a LF?

At the LF, there are few limitations imposed on the planners - the teachers and students - except those dictated by common sense and the basic purposes of the LF. For example, you do not turn the LF into an activity meant only for the glorification or ego-satisfaction of the high-achieving language students. Therefore, if there are competitive activities, the academically non-achieving or average-achieving students must <u>not</u> be slighted or neglected by the insistence on activities that require only a high degree of aptitude or ability in FL. If there are competitive activities, <u>all</u> students must <u>genuinely</u> have an opportunity to win or carry off some glory. I am <u>not</u> saying that the academically superior FL student should be pushed aside. But there must be enough different and varied kinds of activities, requiring many different kinds of talents, aptitudes, and interest, so that all kinds of students will derive satisfaction from participation. Above all, the LF should <u>not</u> be turned into an outdoor AATF or AATSP Annual Contest.

You do not limit participation in the LF to teachers and students. Try to involve the public, parents, taxpayers, administrators, storekeepers, and people in the general community who have special abilities. Especially try to involve people who can carry the PR message to the Board ofEducation, and if possible, to the legislature. And try to involve those remote people, the scholarly, the erudite, the over-specialized,

the university FL teachers, and their students. Try to involve the local newspapers and local TV stations to cover the event and give you favorable publicity.

If you make money, O glorious thought, from the LF, do not put all of it in a school account. Give some of it to a bright - and some to a not so bright - FL student, perhaps in the form of a summer - or a few weeks, abroad.

If you award prizes, do not limit them to handsome and expensive editions of Unamuno, Goethe, or Racine. Give out lots of popular FL records, tapes, cassettes, posters, popular magazine subscriptions - lots of small, inexpensive, material, daily and contemporary - life practical objects. Possibly a local department store will agree to contribute items, but you must ask them for their help. Get out of the classroom and ask.

Get help from church groups, musical and cultural and ethnic groups, fraternal groups, veteran organizations, foreign embassies, and civic organizations. Let everyone feel important.

Now, finally, what <u>do</u> you do at LF? You do everything and anything reasonably connected with the foreign cultures studied in class. You may have a soccer game. After all, soccer is fantastically popular as a spectator sport throughout Europe and Latin and Central America and the Caribbean. Charge a minimal entrance fee and give prizes. Let one team be made up of French and the other team of Spanish or German students.

Since kids - and everyone else - like to eat, have students prepare and sell the gastronomical specialties of the cultures involved. Give a prize, or prizes, for the best dish or dishes. Set up a restaurant or café out of doors with foreign menus. Have cooking demonstrations. Displays of foreign fruits, vegetables and candies and pastries may also be set up. This may be the only time some students will ever taste these foreign dishes.

Set up a booth that gives information on FL study in connection with job opportunities. Invite community leaders to help here.

Show lively, interesting, action-filled FL films that can turn the kids on. Charge a small admission fee.

Have dance groups, singing ensembles, pop music groups and individual performers do contemporary - and traditional - dances and songs. Give prizes for dancing, instrumental music, singing, and costumes.

Have short plays and skits and monologues - original, if possible - performed by students and teachers interested in drama. Don't limit yourself to Le Cid or Lope or Goethe.

For students and teachers who have studied piano, violin, 'cello, etc. have a concert made up of short, popular "Boston Pops" sections. Give out prizes. Keep away from "heavies" like Hindemith and Fauré.

Give awards to people in the community, if this is possible, who represent the various foreign cultures and ethnic groups.

Have debates, oratory, poetry contests. Give a prize for original poetry.

Display money and other realia. Charge a $.05 admission fee.

Put on a style show.

Put on a handicraft exhibition.

Have folk singing and folk dancing.

Put on puppet shows.

Give demonstrations of games popular with children in the various foreign cultures.

Do set up a psychoanalysis booth - à la Charlie Brown - or set up a horoscope booth.

Have debates and discussion groups with topics like the Viet Nam War, Pollution, Marijuana, the Draft. Give prizes, lots of prizes.

Have teachers give five to ten minute mini-lectures on popular, and apocryphal and comic etymologies.

Display newspapers, advertisements, magazines, comic books, etc.

Have native teachers give mini-lectures on Kinesics.

Some schools in Illinois have set up an annual Mardi Gras or Carnaval.

Have a comic dramatization of the death of Julius Cawsar or Joan of Arc or Marie Antoinette or of some other famous historical events. Students love black humor.

Give a prize for the best artistic or dramatic caricature of General Franco or General De Gaulle.

Set up a mock-bull fight.

Have a big outdoor picnic.

In short, do any or all or some or a few of the above-mentioned activities. Most of all, for a few hours once a year, get out of the classroom, let yourselves and the kids have fun in a meaningful and not too structured way. Give prizes, get publicity, develop a new image.

And Monday, return to the classroom. Because that's where it's really at.